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SUBJECT: CHILEAN MEDIA VIGILANT ABOUT RCTV CLOSURE

¶1. SUMMARY: Chilean media coverage of the upcoming cancellation of Radio Caracas TV's concession has increased noticeably in recent weeks. While the GOC has not commented publicly on the RCTV issue, newspaper editorials have argued against Chavez's undemocratic actions and interference in the region. Given the level of public attention, well read Chileans undoubtedly are aware of Chavez's power play to control Venezuela's media. End Summary.

¶2. Influential newspaper-of-record "El Mercurio" has been at the forefront in Chile reporting on developments in Venezuela and Chavez's plans to close RCTV. On May 20, the newspaper ran a seven-page compendium from Latin American dailies that form the "Grupo de Diarios America (GDA)." Titled "The Chavez Phenomenon," the report marked the beginning of regular reporting on Chavez' activities in other countries. Highlighted activities included:

-- "The signing of eight cooperation agreements last year, ranging from defense to education, the purchase of Bolivia's treasury bonds, the installation of 100 radio stations in rural communities, and 5,000 scholarships to study in Caracas or Havana, are just some examples of the assistance that Venezuela has provided Bolivia, the country where Chavez is exerting the largest degree of influence.

-- "Venezuela will donate over US\$2 million to Bolivia in sports implementation, ranging from exercise machines to soccer balls. Due to the lack of electricity in rural areas, Chavez also donated 2,000 solar panels to help eliminate illiteracy in 1,800 rural communities.

-- "In Peru, Chavez has forged an alliance with regional authorities by providing medical assistance, support for small businesses, and scholarships to study in Caracas or Havana.

-- "The association between the Venezuelan and Brazilian state oil companies, the array of agreements and growing trade between the two countries make the Lula-Chavez dispute over regional leadership unimportant. The fact is that Chavez has become a key investor for President Lula.

-- "Political analyst Gonzalo Meza says Chile is of strategic interest for Venezuela, because it is a valid interlocutor with Pacific axis countries -- Peru, Colombia, and Mexico -- and the Atlantic alliance formed by Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. He adds that many in Chile do not follow the liberal model promoted by the Lagos and Bachelet administrations or the one promoted by the Cuban Revolution, and therefore look at the Venezuelan process with interest.

¶3. A May 23 editorial in "El Mercurio", "Chavez in Latin America,"

commented on the GDA articles, confirming Chavez' interference in other countries:

The "Grupo de Diarios America is exploring ... Chavez' penetration in Latin America. From the abundant information gathered we can see evidence of the so called 'social diplomacy'... which consists in penetrating a country's social structure by-passing the government.... The 'Chavistas'... advance by providing material aid to the poor ... offering low-income groups scholarships, health, and education assistance as a means to teach Venezuelan and Cuban political ideology.... The 'Bolivarian leader' is not only set on establishing in his country the 21st Socialist Revolution, he also wants to export it to the continent, as is evident in Bolivia and Ecuador. None of this is unimportant for Chile and our authorities would do well in weighting it very carefully."

¶4. On May 24, "El Mercurio" published an op-ed by Radio Caracas TV Executive Director Marcel Granier entitled, "Letter to Hugo Chavez." He stated, "The message is clear, Chavez' influence in the region is growing at a fast pace regardless of the official relations he might have with governments, and the Chilean administration must take note of it."

¶5. Government-owned, editorially independent, "La Nacion," on April 25 highlighted that OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza criticized Venezuela by stating that while Latin America is gradually and consistently progressing on freedom of expression, recent judicial decisions to silence and threaten mass communication media are a concern.

¶6. El Mercurio reported on May 10 that the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) is closely watching developments concerning the closure of RCTV.

¶7. "El Mercurio's correspondent in Caracas on April 29 in an article entitled, "RCTV's Struggle," quoted RCTV journalists: "It is difficult to explain the environment at the station, because as support for RCTV has grown in the country, the President personally attacks the station and those who support us," stated Miguel Angel Rodriguez. "This is psychological terror," he added.

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